

INQUIRY INTO PLANNING AND DELIVERY OF SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Lennox Head P&C

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Submission to the inquiry into the planning and delivery of school infrastructure in NSW

Background

We are the Lennox Head P&C and we thank the Committee for the opportunity to respond to this inquiry. We seek to share our views and experiences with the Committee regarding the infrastructure project of Lennox Head Public School (LHPS) located in the Northern Rivers. We acknowledge that there were aspects of this project that were outside of the Department of Education's control and the recent efforts undertaken to progress the project. We also recognise and respect the cultural significance of the site on the school grounds for the Aboriginal people. We look forward to the opportunity for greater collaboration with the Department of Education to deliver the LHPS infrastructure project.

Executive Summary

The planning and funding for the upgrade of the LHPS infrastructure commenced in 2016 however there is a profound delay with construction. Between 2016 and 2021 enrolment headcount at LHPS increased by 46% to 504 students. The Department of Education utilised inaccurate demographic data in its initial infrastructure planning, and over time, the **mismatch between school infrastructure demand and supply at Lennox Head continues to grow**. Whilst the Department continues to implement measures to manage the growth in enrolments its **plans to build the school infrastructure to cater for the growth are unspecific and unfunded**. In Dec 2021 a decision was made to focus capital expenditure on a new infrastructure project to build a new school on a new site subject to site identification, funding and planning approval within an **undisclosed timeframe for execution**.

There has been and continues to be a **lack of public transparency and disclosure** regarding this school infrastructure project and over the years any information that was shared with the wider community of Lennox Head has been sporadic **without opportunity to provide input or influence decisions**. The overdue delivery and ongoing fluidity of this infrastructure project places the present school community of LHPS at a **growing disadvantage** with inadequate and declining fit for purpose infrastructure for contemporary learning and teaching.

Timeline of key events

2016: Planning commenced for LHPS to be upgraded with 8 new permanent teaching spaces, new administration building, a canteen, out of school hours support facility, a new sports court, landscaping and refurbishment of special programs room.

2017: Announcement of capital works to upgrade LHPS by 2018.

2018: The upgrade of LHPS is delayed with the discovery of Aboriginal artefacts.

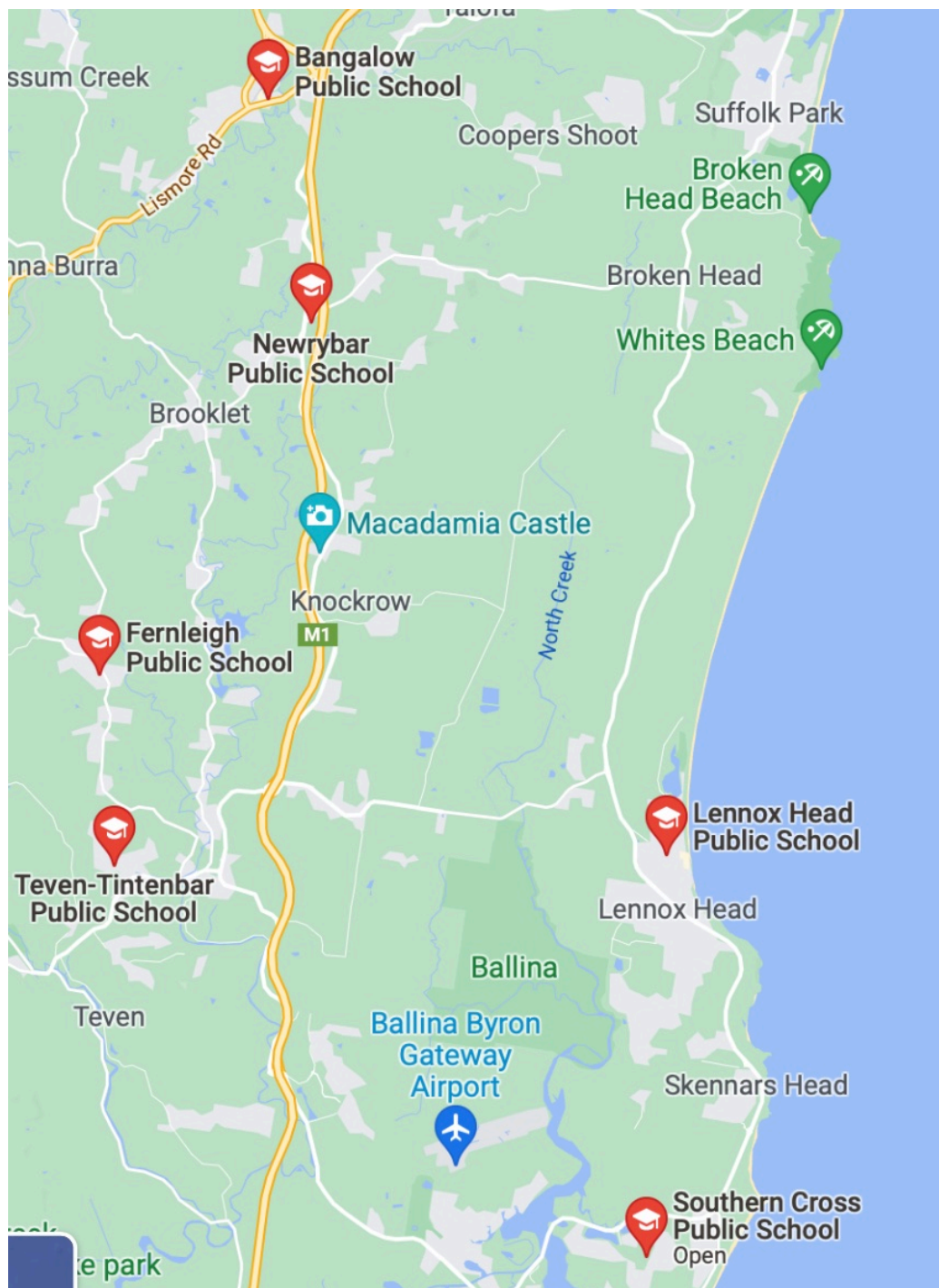
Mar 2020: The Department of Education announces no change to the original scope of the upgrade and main construction works to commence mid 2020 with expected completion mid 2021 on present school grounds. ([Source: School Infrastructure NSW Mar 2020 LHPS Community Update](#))

Oct 2021: The Department of Education announces continued planning and delivery of the LHPS upgrade, and acknowledges since the initial planning of the upgrade the local population and student enrolments has continued to grow. Mechanisms will be introduced to manage enrolments as well as an assessment of options to reduce the intake area to LHPS. ([Source: School Infrastructure NSW Oct 2021 LHPS Community Update](#))

Dec 2021: The Department of Education announces the focus of the capital works is now a new project to move to a new school on a new site subject to site availability, funding and planning approval. A program of maintenance works will commence and a temporary classroom will be added from Term 1, 2022. ([Source: School Infrastructure NSW Dec 2021 LHPS Community Update](#))

Figure 1: Map of Public Schools neighbouring LHPS

Source: Google Maps



Responses to Terms of Reference

1(b) the adequacy of plans by the NSW Government to deliver educational facilities for every NSW public school student

The plans to deliver a public educational facility are inadequate. Parents and carers are making decisions now about their children's education. At the time of submission to this inquiry, the community of Lennox Head remains unaware as to the length of time required to identify a new site for the school nor to build the new school. These unknowns creates reasons for some parents and carers to consider enrolling their children into the private education system.

As at Term 1 2022 there continues to be more demountable classrooms than permanent classrooms on site at LHPS (13 demountables versus 8 permanent classrooms)¹. A demountable also functions as the staffroom and additional office space (*refer to LHPS aerial images on pages 10-11*).

LHPS is situated on 26,000 sqm of land and is zoned as R3 medium density residential². A real estate professional within our community advised that 12,300 sqm of land to which the school is currently built upon is conservatively estimated to be worth in excess of \$12.5m at present residential market value³ (*refer to Figure 2*). There is keen interest amongst the community of Lennox Head to understand whether the land will be sold with all proceeds directed towards funding the new school build.

Recommendation:

The Department of Education should disclose to the community the **priority status** of LHPS in School Infrastructure NSW's Capital Investment Plans, how and when it **plans to secure funding** for this infrastructure project in light of the rescope from upgrade to new build.

Figure 2: Aerial map of LHPS for land value estimate



¹ Source: Lennox Head Public School

² [NSW Valuer General Land Value Search of Property No. 3350665 Lennox Head Public School](#)

³ Estimate assumes 49 townhouses at 250sqm per property is constructed

1(c) adequacy of investment in new or upgraded infrastructure at existing NSW public schools, including management, planning, design, construction, maintenance and budget and expenditure of new projects

The level of investment in LHPS is unclear. Whilst the Department of Education continues to provide assurances to improve the infrastructure of LHPS, there has been and continues to be **a lack of public transparency** with the management and planning of this project in particular

- 1) who has the authority to make decisions,
- 2) who are the key stakeholders,
- 3) what is the decision making framework and process including any relevant issues and policies that apply,
- 4) what is the community consultation framework,
- 5) what is the process of review

A recent example of the lack of public transparency is the decision not to proceed with the infrastructure upgrade of LHPS on its existing site. The Department of Education stated that this decision was based on extensive stakeholder engagement, is in the best interest of all stakeholders and the best outcome for students in the long term. However there is no public disclosure as to whom within the Department made the decision, which stakeholders were involved, what was the process of consultation, what options and trade-offs were identified and discussed in determining this decision, and how this decision also aligns with other relevant Department policies and values.

The school community has been waiting since 2016 for infrastructure that enables contemporary learning and teaching, and in 2022 they receive a program of maintenance works and an additional demountable bringing it to a total of 15 demountables on site. The educational needs of the students identified in 2016 with the initial infrastructure upgrade plan remain unmet.

At the time of submission to this inquiry, there is no public information disclosing when a new school site will be identified nor when funding and planning approvals will be secured. The unknown length of time adds to the concern that the present school community of LHPS will be at a **growing disadvantage** especially when infrastructure upgrades progress at neighbouring Teven-Tintenbar Public School⁴ and Bangalow Public School⁵ (refer to Table 1).

⁴ Site construction works at [Teven-Tintenbar PS](#) commenced in Dec 2021

⁵ The infrastructure upgrade to [Bangalow PS](#) is planned for completion by late 2022

Table 1: Comparison of School Upgrade Funding and Enrolment Headcount

PUBLIC SCHOOL	SCHOOL UPGRADE FUNDING COMMITMENT FY21-22*	ENROLMENT HEADCOUNT CY2021^ / CY2020~
Bangalow	\$1,446,000	242~
Lennox Head	\$561,000	504^
Teven-Tintenbar	\$2,591,000	179~

* Source: [NSW State Budget FY2021-2022](#), Education

^ Source: 2021 headcount for LHPS advised by the school

~ Source: Bangalow and Teven-Tintenbar headcount based on CY2020 data from Myschool.edu.au

Recommendations:

Increasing public transparency assists to improve wider understanding of and how the community of Lennox Head can contribute to this infrastructure project. The Department of Education can assist by

- a) **clearly identifying** the stakeholders, **disclosing** the decision making and community consultation frameworks as well as the policies and values relevant to this infrastructure project.
- b) **providing ease of public access to information** on the overall project planning and governance, key timelines for the planning and delivery phases of the new school, relevant and concise updates on the progress of key phases the project with opportunities for community feedback or consultation with reasonable response timeframes that will not impose additional delays to project delivery.

Until funding is secured to build the new school, the community expects the Department to continue to meet its compliance obligations of maintaining LHPS to set standards. The Department should also take steps to **identify and implement remedial actions** like upgrading non-fixed assets such as computers, technology, learning and teaching equipment for delivery in 2022.

1(d) the role of community organisations or groups in responding to the lack of or shortage of educational facilities at NSW public schools in areas of high growth

Community organisations and groups should have the opportunity to contribute equally in matters pertaining to their local public school. Lennox Head is an area of high growth with residential development forecasted to increase by 39.5% (equivalent to an increase of 1,128 dwellings) between 2016 and 2036⁶. Recent reports from the NSW Valuer General reveal strong increases in residential land values in the Northern Rivers driven by tree change and sea change lifestyle buyers⁷, and strong demand for medium density properties in Lennox Head⁸.

The Annual Reports of LHPS for [2019](#) and [2020](#) document the frustration of parents and carers with the prolonged delay of and inability to provide input into the school upgrade project. Parents remain concerned about the inadequacy of and declining fit for purpose of the present school infrastructure in particular (*refer to LHPS aerial images on pages 10-11*)

- a) diminished play space
- b) the canteen, lost property and music room function within the one demountable
- c) senior students are moved to an oval offsite near the school to play
- d) reduced line of sight of younger students due to plethora of demountables

In recent years attempts were made by the President of the P&C as well as individuals and groups of parents to communicate their concerns and feedback in writing to both the Minister and the Department of Education with limited success.

Recommendation:

The community of Lennox Head including the parents and carers of the students should be **identified as a stakeholder** in the LHPS infrastructure project moving forward.

⁶ [Ballina Shire Council - Forecast Residential Development 2016-2036](#)

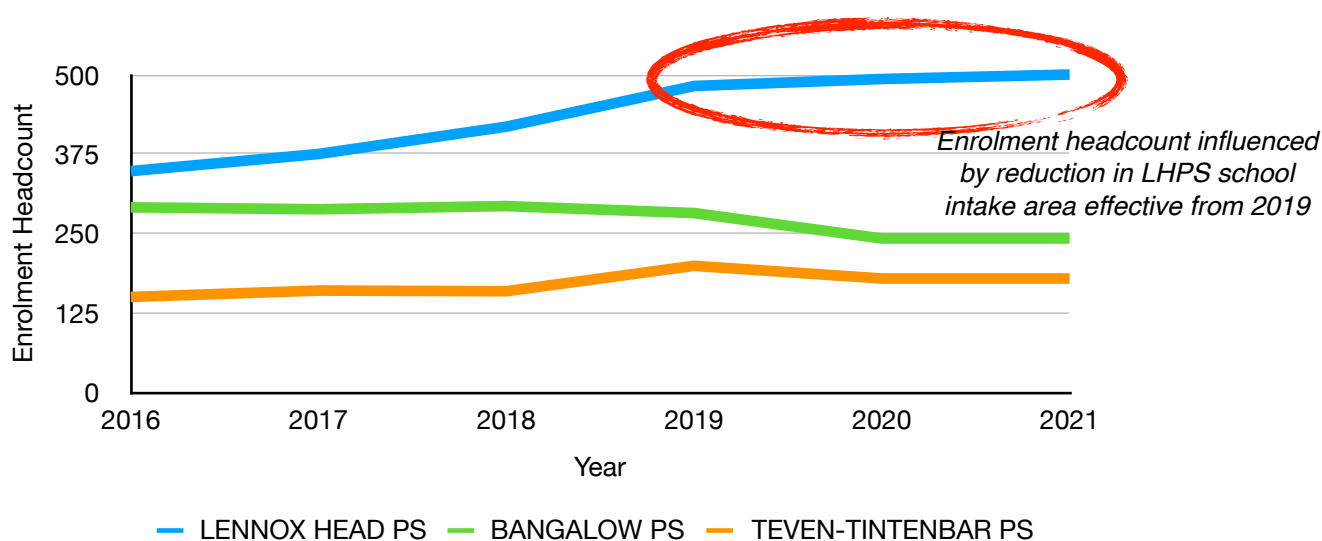
⁷ [NSW Valuer General - Report of NSW Land Values as at 1 July 2020 - pg 18](#)

⁸ [NSW Valuer General - Valuation Report for the Ballina LGA November 2020 - pg 9](#)

1(e) adequacy of demographic planning for anticipated school enrolments

To date the demographic planning for anticipated school enrolments has been inadequate. In 2019 the LHPS school intake area was redrawn to exclude the community of Skennars Head. In Oct 2021 the Department of Education acknowledged that since its initial infrastructure planning the population and student enrolment at Lennox Head has continued to grow⁹ and further measures necessary to manage enrolments of public schools in the local area. In Dec 2021 the Department announced more changes will be made to the intake area for LHPS¹⁰ in order to manage enrolment growth and that the community will be informed of the timing of the changes in 2022.

Figure 3: Comparison of School Enrolment Headcount 2016-2021



Data Sources

NSW Education Data Hub - [Government School Enrolments by Headcount 2004-2018](#)

2019-2020 data from myschool.edu.au

2021 enrolment headcount for LHPS obtained from the school

Assumption: No change in enrolment headcount for Bangalow and Teven-Tintenbar between 2020-2021 as 2021 data is yet to be publicly available.

⁹ [School Infrastructure NSW Oct 2021 LHPS Community Update](#)

¹⁰ [School Infrastructure NSW Dec 2021 LHPS Community Update](#)

1(f) delays in converting new school announcements into site identification and school construction

At the time of submission to the inquiry, there continues to be **no public disclosure** regarding the timeframes intended by the Department of Education to

- a) identify the new school site,
- b) conduct its feasibility studies and needs analysis,
- c) secure the funding approval,
- d) secure the planning approvals

The Department should have identified the new school site, conducted its feasibility studies and needs analysis alongside its decision not to proceed with the infrastructure upgrade on the existing school site and to build a new school.

In Dec 2021 the Department of Education announced it intends to *fast track plans to identify other options that will meet the educational needs of the students across the region in the long term*¹¹. The definition of *fast track* is unspecified and this also raises questions amongst the community whether the Department is cluster planning as an option to build the new school by possibly consolidating LHPS with neighbouring public schools such as Teven-Tintenbar, Fernleigh and Newrybar Public Schools.

The delivery of the LHPS infrastructure project is at least four years delayed and these undisclosed and unspecified timeframes adds further frustration and concern amongst the community.

Recommendation:

Urgent priority must be placed on **publicly disclosing information** pertaining to these timeframes.

1(i) any other related matters

In terms of **asset management** there continues to be no public disclosure regarding the future use of the existing LHPS site once the school is relocated as well as how the Aboriginal cultural significance will be protected into the future. The existing LHPS site is not only historically and culturally significant, it is a place of collective memories.

LHPS commenced in 1882 with 54 students and generations have since appreciated its present seaside location¹². We advocate for the new school to be situated in the Lennox Head village centre as it is an invaluable part of our community, drives the local economy and is a focal point of community interaction.

¹¹ [School Infrastructure NSW Dec 2021 LHPS Community Update](#)

¹² [Lennox Head Public School Prospectus - pg 1](#)

Figure 4: LHPS aerial view May 2017



Figure 5: LHPS aerial view Oct 2021



Figure 6: LHPS aerial view May 2016

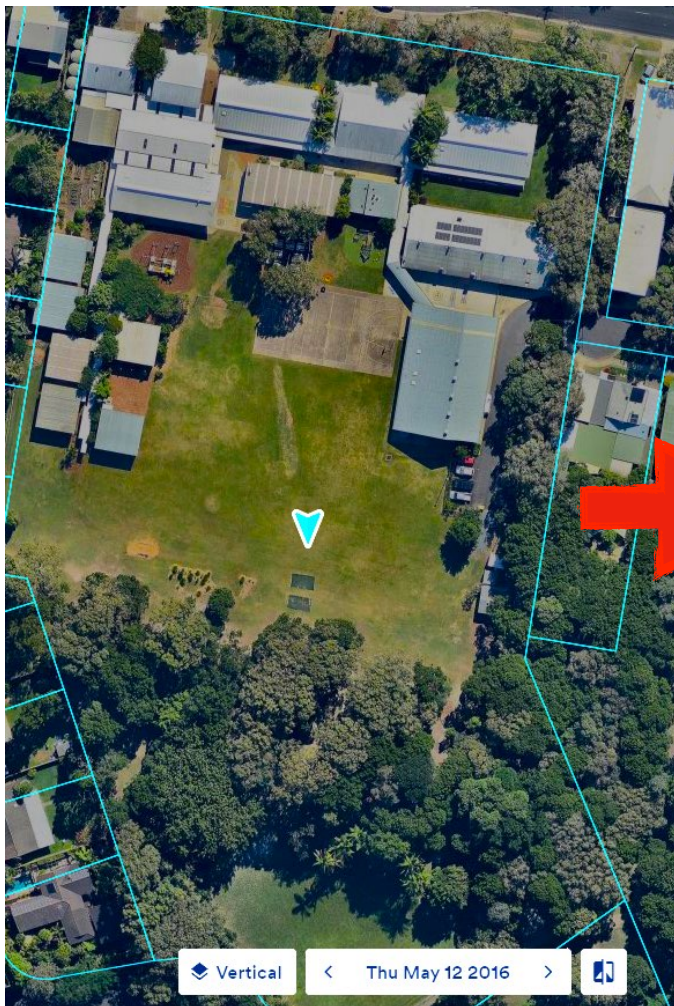


Figure 7: LHPS aerial view Oct 2021

